

REMARKS

Applicants request favorable reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection set forth in the above-noted Office Action in view of the foregoing amendments and the following remarks.

Claims 1, 2, 4, and 5 remain pending, with claims 1 and 4 being independent. Claims 1 and 4 have been amended. Support for the amendments can be found throughout the originally-filed disclosure, including for example, at page 21, lines 13-24 of the specification. Further examples of support for the amendments can be found in the specifically-disclosed examples, such as at page 84, line 7 through page 85, line 6 of the specification. Accordingly, Applicants submit that the amendments do not include new matter.

Claims 1, 2, 4, and 5 are rejected in the Office Action under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Bogoshian (U.S. Patent Application Pub. No. 2005/0135847) in view of Tanaka et al. (U.S. Patent Application Pub. No. 2005/0042534) and Uehara et al. (U.S. Patent Application Pub. No. 2004/0057741).

Amended independent claim 1 recites a fixing method comprising, inter alia, heat-pressure-fixing an unfixed toner image formed on a recording medium, wherein the method includes the use of a first fixing unit that is a belt nip fixing type fixing unit, and a second fixing unit that is a roller nip fixing type fixing unit. Amendment independent claim 4 recites a fixing device with analogous features.

In an image forming method or apparatus, the use of a belt nip fixing type fixing unit can provide both a wide nip width and reduced contact pressure. Therefore, when a belt nip type fixing unit is employed as the first fixing unit through which an unfixed toner image is passed, the unfixed toner image is minimally disturbed, and a higher-quality image can be obtained. Further, a gloss of the image can be controlled when the recording medium is subsequently

passed through a roller nip type fixing unit that applies a high pressure. Thus, through the combination of the claimed first fixing unit that is a belt nip fixing type fixing unit, and a second fixing unit that is a roller nip fixing type fixing unit, high image quality with high gloss and gloss uniformity can be achieved. See, e.g., page 6, lines 11-24; page 21, lines 13-24 of the specification.

Applicants submit that the combination of references cited in the Office Action do not disclose or suggest all of the features recited in amended independent claims 1 and 4, including the combination of first and second fixing units.

Bogoshian discloses a single, roller nip fixing type fixing unit 102. See, e.g., Figs. 1 and 2; paragraph 0045. Therefore, this reference clearly cannot be taken to suggest the first, belt nip fixing type fixing unit in combination with a second fixing unit, as recited amended independent claims 1 and 4.

Uehara et al. discloses a fixing unit 10 and an image gloss controller 30 as part of a fixing device. Both of the structures, however, are roller nip fixing type devices. See, e.g., Fig. 1. Thus, Uehara et al. also cannot be taken to suggest the combination of first and second fixing units recited in amended independent claims 1 and 4.

Finally, Tanaka et al. does not disclose a combination of fixing units, or describe in detail any particular structure for fixing units. Therefore, this reference also cannot be taken to suggest the first and second fixing units recited in amended independent claims 1 and 4.

Thus, for at least the foregoing reasons, Applicants submit that Bogoshian, Uehara et al., and Tanaka et al., whether taken individually or in combination, fail to disclose or suggest the combination of features recited in amended independent claims 1 and 4. Accordingly, the Section 103 rejection should be withdrawn.

Applicants submit that the present application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration, withdrawal of the rejection set forth in the Office Action, and a Notice of Allowability are requested.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. Office by telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our address listed below.

Respectfully submitted,

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